

An early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *King Lear*

William Shakespeare, *King Lear*. London: Nathaniel Butter, [1619]. 7 3/8 inches x 5 3/8 inches (187 mm x 136 mm), [88] pages, A–L4.

M. VWilliam Shake-speare, | *HIS* | True Chronicle History of the life | and death of King *Lear*, and his | *three Daughters*. | *With the vnfortunate life of EDGAR*, | sonne and heire to the Earle of *Glocester*, and | *his sullen and assumed humour of TOM* | of Bedlam. | *As it was plaid before the Kings Maiesty at White-Hall, vp- | pon S. Stephens night, in Christmas Hollidaies*. | By his Maiesties Seruants, playing vsually at the | *Globe* on the *Banck-side*. | [Heb Ddieu device] | Printed for *Nathaniel Butter*. | 1608.

Shakespeare's quartos, so named because of their format (a single sheet folded twice, creating four leaves or eight pages), are the first printed representations of his plays and, as none of the plays survives in manuscript, of great importance to Shakespeare scholarship. Only twenty-one of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto before the closure of the theaters and outbreak of civil war in 1642. These quartos were printed from either Shakespeare's "foul papers" (a draft with notations and changes that was given in sections to actors for their respective roles); from "fair copies" created from foul papers that presented the entire action of the play; from promptbooks, essentially fair copies annotated and expanded by the author and acting company to clarify stage directions, sound effects, etc.; or from a previously published quarto edition. The quartos were inexpensive to produce and were published for various reasons, including to secure the acting company's rights to the material and to bring in money during the plague years in London when the theaters were closed.

At the opening of *King Lear*, the title character, ruler of England, announces he will divide his kingdom among his three daughters according to their love for him. Goneril and Regan make elaborate declarations of love for him, while Cordelia says simply that she loves him as a daughter ought. Despite the protests of his closest advisor, the Earl of Kent, Lear disowns

Cordelia and splits his domain between Regan and Goneril. He then banishes Kent and goes to live with Goneril. The king of France marries Cordelia despite her lack of dowry and title. Lear soon quarrels with Goneril over his entourage, which includes the banished yet loyal Kent in disguise, and leaves to live with Regan. Lear and Regan also argue, and she reduces the number of his retainers. Goneril arrives and the sisters dismiss Lear's courtiers altogether. Lear, driven to madness by their ill-treatment, wanders about in a tempest and is led to shelter by the Earl of Gloucester, who is blinded by Regan and her husband because of his "treachery." Gloucester's faithful son Edgar prevents his suicide, while his illegitimate son Edmund becomes Goneril's lover. Cordelia leads an army to rescue Lear from her sisters and is reconciled with him; Lear regains his sanity. Cordelia's forces are defeated by those of her sisters, and she and Lear are imprisoned. Regan has also become Edmund's lover, so she and Goneril fight and kill each other. Edgar mortally wounds Edmund, who has ordered Cordelia to be hanged. Lear dies of his grief.

This second quarto of *King Lear* from 1619, now at the National Library of Scotland, is in a nineteenth-century half-leather binding with dark green straight-grained morocco spine and tips edged with gold rules, dark tan boards. Lettered in gold: "KING | LEAR" in the second compartment; "WM. | SHAKESPEARE" in the fourth and "1608" in the last. The bookplate of John Patrick Crichton Stuart, the third Marquis of Bute is on the front pastedown; the bookplate for the Bute Collection of English Plays is on the back pastedown.

The first recorded owner of this second quarto of *King Lear* is James Christie (1730–1803), a London auctioneer whose collection was sold in 1804; it was acquired by the English book collector Richard Forster, who sold it in 1806. It was then purchased by John Stuart, the first Marquis of Bute (1744–1814). Stuart added it to the Bute Collection of early English plays that was initially formed by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) and expanded by her son-in-law John Stuart, third Earl of Bute. The first Marquis of Bute notably acquired 39 Shakespeare quartos. The collection contains 1,266 English plays and includes seventeenth- and eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare's plays and examples of the foremost dramatists from Elizabethan, Jacobean, Caroline, and Restoration periods; also included are a number of

promptbooks. The Bute Collection is now in the National Library of Scotland, which purchased it from Major Michael Crichton Stuart on April 3, 1956.

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